**VOLUME 8; CHAPTER 21 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE FRUIT-BEARING FRIENDS OF JESUS by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*No longer do I call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known unto you. Ye did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you.*

*John 15:15,16*

THE WORDS OF THE TEXT ARE FOUND AMONG THE RECORDS OF those tender and intimate conversations of our Lord and His disciples on the eve of His passion, and we cannot better prepare our hearts for considering them than by reminding ourselves of the circumstances under which they were uttered. They were indeed dark days in the experience of these men. Behind them lay those brief but wonderful years of comradeship with this strangely commanding Person, those years of ever-growing wonder as they traveled with Him and listened to Him and watched Him. Ahead lay some dark and unfathomable mystery which filled their hearts with foreboding. He gathered them into an upper room, and talked to them. The first part of the Lord's teaching was strangely disturbed by these men; the second part of it was undisturbed and quiet. He first girded Himself with a towel, and bent to wash their feet, and He was disturbed by Peter's protest. Then, at the Passover feast, the atmosphere became electric, and the teaching was disturbed when He excluded Judas. He was further interrupted by Peter's question, "Whither goest Thou?" by Thomas saying, "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; how know we the way?" by Philip's outcry, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us"; by Jude's inquiry, "Lord, what is come to pass that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us and not unto the world?" Jesus proceeded to teach them, until, hushed into silence, they followed Him as, leaving the upper room, He moved perchance down the slopes of the mountain, or perchance to the temple in the darkness of the night, uttering as He went the great allegory of the vine, and so completing His instructions. We shall be helped to an understanding of the words of the text if we remember the purpose of these discourses. The keynote of all of them is found in the opening declaration of chapter thirteen: "Now before the feast of the passover, Jesus knowing that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." He was preparing them for the future, for the immediate future, dark and mysterious, the tragic hours of the Cross, and for the future that lay beyond, when the new light should shine and the new power be realized at the coming of the Spirit. The final discourse of Jesus upon this occasion was introduced, as I have said, by the allegory of the vine, and our text is contained within that discourse, and is immediately related to that allegory. When Jesus said but I to these men, "No longer do I call you servants ... but I have called you friends and appointed you, that ye shall should go and bear fruit, and … that whatsoever, ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you," He was but carrying out in definite application in one particular regard the whole figure suggested by His magnificent claim, "I am the Vine, the true."

Two matters demand our consideration. We are arrested first, by the changed relationship and its reasons; and, second, by the resulting responsibility, in itself and as to its possibility.

In the first place let us observe this change in relationship. That the relationship was changed is certain, for the form in which our Lord uttered the words indicates and emphasizes the thought of deeper relationship into which these men were now to pass; "No longer do I call you slaves." The change was not capricious; it was the result of previous training. He called them disciples at the beginning. There came a moment when He called them apostles. Now He called them friends. That is not to say that they had not already been in some sense His friends. That is not to say that they would cease to be disciples. That is not to say they would cease to be apostles. As a matter of fact, their full apostolic work had not yet commenced. They were disciples when first they followed Him, apostles when, after a period of training, He first sent them forth; but now He said to them, "No longer do I call you servants … I have called you friends."

A slave was the property of his master, unable to possess, and so having nothing of his own, unable to elect and so unable to do, on his own initiative. A slave, therefore, was at the disposal of his owner, all his energy must be for the increase of the possessions of the one who possessed him; all his choosing must be in accord with the choosing of the one who owned him. The law of the slave's life is unquestioning submission, blind obedience. Is not all this a description of the relationship these disciples still bore to Christ? Does it not describe the relation that the Christian must ever bear to Christ? Yes, in some senses. We are still His bond-slaves, and it is to be noted that ere this discourse was ended He called them so again. In the twentieth verse we read, "Remember the word that I said unto you, a slave is not greater than his lord." That was a reference to what He had said in the past, but it indicated a maintained relationship. They were still His slaves in some sense of the word; yet He distinctly marked a change in relationship when He said, "No longer do I call you slaves." It is noticeable, more-over, that in the apostolic writings the apostles spoke of themselves as slaves, and the apostle who was added to their company, born out of due season, but not a whit behind the chiefest of them, delighted ever to call himself the bond-slave of Jesus Christ. Christians are still the bond-slaves of Jesus, His property, unable to possess or to have of their own, unable to elect save under the compulsion of His choice, or to do save as doing is putting forth energy on His behalf. Christians are still called on to increase His possessions, and to elect in accordance with His elections. But here we halt. The slave renders unquestioning submission, and blind obedience. That is not the last word about Christian discipleship. It is at that very point that we discover the character of this change in relationship. "I have called you friends," and in a moment we are introduced into another realm of thought which we shall see does not negative the essential values of the first, but rather transfigures them and makes them glorious and beautiful. What are friends? When we begin to think seriously, we realize how we constantly abuse the great word friend, how casually and carelessly we make use of it. Sit down some time, and write a list of your friends. None of us have very many; we have many acquaintances - and thank God for the whole of them - but few friends.

What is the basis of friendship? Reciprocal and self-emptying love, and, consequently, mutual interest. Find me my friend, and I will say to you, This friend loves me to the forgetfulness of himself, and I love him to the forgetfulness of myself. He is forever seeking my interests, and I am always seeking his, so far as our lives touch each other in this realm of human friendship. Jesus said, "No longer do I call you servants ... but I have called you friends." The law of life in slavery is unquestioning submission and blind obedience. The law of life in friendship is informed submission and intelligent obedience. The friends of Jesus are submissive, but by no means unquestioningly. They are submissive after they have asked questions and He has satisfied them. The friends of Jesus are obedient, but no longer blindly. He has told them all things. "The slave knoweth not what his Lord doeth"; he has to imagine; the friend knows what his Lord is doing; his Lord has told him. He is rendering obedience no longer blindly but intelligently. In this exposition I am warranted by the whole movement of the story. Did I not remind you of the disturbances in the teaching of the Lord in the upper room, "Lord, whither goest Thou?" Jesus answered, "Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now; but thou shalt follow afterwards." "Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now?" Is that a slave speaking? Yes, a slave seeking friendship. Never forget this, Christ was not angry with Peter, He answered Peter, "Whither I go ye know the way." Then Thomas said, "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; how know we the way?" Is that a slave? Yes, a slave getting ready to be a friend, asking his questions. Then Philip cried out almost angrily, almost in protest, "Shew us the Father and it sufficeth us." Is that a slave? Yes, on the highway to friendship. These men did not become friends because they asked questions, but because He was willing to answer them. He made them His friends, they did not make Him their friend. "Ye did not choose Me, but I chose you." The central Personality, full of glory and light, full of surprise and amazement, is neither Peter, nor Thomas, nor Philip, nor Jude, but Jesus. He is seen taking hold of the weaknesses of men and making them the foundations of strength. When He had answered all their questions and removed their blindness, He said, "No longer do I call you servants ... I have called you friends," for I have admitted you to the secrets, I have told you all things.

Consequently, in friendship we have the fellowship of love as the inspiration and the atmosphere of fellowship in effort. That is an infinitely higher plane on which to live than that of slavery. This is what Jesus' heart is ever seeking, not that we should render Him blind obedience, but intelligent obedience; not that we should give to Him unquestioning submission, but satisfied submission; not that we should drag ourselves after Him as though it were hard work, and imagine that in the dragging there is virtue; but that we should go gaily, gladly, to suffer for His name, for very love of Him; not slaves, but friends, and therefore slaves as never before.

What was the reason for this change? I have already answered this question incidentally, yet it is so important that we shall dwell on it for a moment longer. Jesus distinctly told them why He made the change. "No longer do I call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known unto you." The basis on which our Lord made the change of relationship was, first, His action in revealing God to them; and, second, their new capacity for service resulting from the revelation.

His revelation of God to them we may consider generally and particularly. I shall dwell principally on the particular revelation contained within this very discourse. To this group of men He had made God known. They had found God in Him. Perhaps at the moment they hardly knew it. I do not believe that at this time they could have formulated a creed which would have contained within it a declaration of Jesus' Deity, but they had found God in Him, and by and by they would find out that they had found God in Him. They had learned two things to the full realization of which they came progressively, to the ultimate realization of which the Church of God has not yet come, so vast are they. They had found in Him the revelation of the Divine holiness. They had found in Him the revelation of the Divine love. The proportion in which they were conscious of the Divine holiness and the Divine love through His revelation was the proportion in which they understood Him, and, understanding Him, were prepared to be not slaves alone, but friends. The holiness of God was revealed, not so much in the teaching of Jesus - though there surely it is revealed - as in Himself. Let me speak of Him for a moment as man alone, let me think of Him in His human life only. In Him I see a man who by all His affirmations, those which were definite and specific, and those which were occasional and incidental, revealed the fact that all His life was conditioned within the will of God. Then let me watch His life in order that I may understand the will of God, and so know the God in whose will He lived. As I watch Him in the selflessness of His selfhood, in the awful purity of His familiarity with all human emotions, I begin to understand what His God must be. Whereas that does not exhaust the meaning of the great word spoken to Philip, that word has that value also, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." He that has seen any man has seen his God. Every man reveals his God in what he is himself. Ultimately the soul responsive to his God, if the god be lust, greed, passion, will reveal in his own face lust, greed, passion. In that sense Jesus challenged men when He said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Those who have seen Him have seen God in what He is; in His sinlessness they have seen the holiness of God. In Him, moreover, they had seen the Divine compassion, the Divine love; and this, not so much in what He was in Himself, but in what He was toward sinning men.

Here again I pause to lay emphasis on something I have already said incidentally, that the Church itself has not yet grasped the fulness of this revelation of the love of God in Jesus as seen in His attitude toward sinning men. Never were His lips disfigured by the curve of contempt. Never did His face convey to sinning men the assumption of superiority. Never did He say a hard thing to a sinning soul. That is what created difficulty in the mind of the rulers of His time. This Man loved sinners, made friends with them, did not patronize them, did not denounce them. Oh, God, that the Church might begin to see this compassion of God as revealed in Jesus. That compassion is not pity that excuses wrong, it is love that dies for wrong. The measure in which we have seen God as Jesus revealed Him is the measure in which we are prepared to be His friends, and therefore the friends of God.

In these final discourses God was revealed by Jesus supremely in His redeeming grace. Take the whole happenings of the upper room. There was, first, the inclusive symbol, when He girded Himself with a towel. That towel was the insignia of slavery. When Peter wrote his letter, he was surely thinking about that upper room when he said, "Gird yourselves with humility as with a slave's apron." The apron, which was the symbol of slavery, Jesus girt about Himself and washed their feet. That act was symbolic of redeeming grace, stooping, bending, until it had taken the meanest position of all in order to lift men to the height of glory. In that stooping, bending, bowing of the towel-girt slave, Jesus was revealing God. Then followed the exclusion of Judas. There is an attitude of soul which grace abandons! There is an attitude of spirit which grace excludes from its covenant! After that came the inclusion of Peter. Grace said to him, "The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice. Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me." There is an attitude of soul most dastardly, yet having at its center high aspiration and noble desire, which grace includes, fulfilling the high desire by the destruction of the thing that is mean. Grace was revealed in the expository answers Jesus gave to these men. Mark the sequence of them. To Thomas He said, I am the way to the Father; to Philip He said, I am the Father also, for if you have seen Me you have seen Him; to Jude He said, The Father will love and come to those who come to Him through Me.

Now said He to them, I have made known these things concerning God to you, and on the basis of this revelation I call you friends. The revelation of love produced love. There came a day when John wrote a letter in which he said, "We love Him because He first loved us." John knew the fact of the love of God through his Lord. So John became his Lord's friend. The revelation of the Divine love in all its glory created love within the souls of these men. Jesus Himself in the prayer that followed said, "This is life eternal, that they should know Thee the only true God." On the basis of that unveiling of God through Christ these men became slaves no longer, but friends. Therefore they were ever after slaves volitionally, not of compulsion, no longer dragging themselves after Him reluctantly, but rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

So we pass to glance at the resulting responsibility, in both itself and as to its possibility. Our Lord here declared that these men were appointed by Himself to two things; to bear fruit, and to ask whatsoever they would of the Father. These two things must never be separated from each other. The purpose is fruit-bearing; asking is in order to fulfil that purpose. Our Lord had appointed the disciples to bear fruit as branches of the vine, and He had appointed them to ask whatsoever was necessary to enable them to bear that fruit. The idea is of the branch doing two things which a branch always does in a fruitful vine: it bears fruit, and it does so by demanding from the vine the life that enables it to bear fruit. In any vine on which our eyes may look we may observe the fruit-bearing branch and know that it is asking, demanding, its life of the vine, and expressing the answers it receives in the clusters of fruit it bears.

Nothing can be more important in our interpretation of this particular passage than that we should be harmonious with the whole allegory. When our Lord made use of it He was not using a new figure, He was borrowing an old one. That is the meaning of His claim, the smoothness of our translation of which robs it a little of its impact. What Jesus literally said was, "I am the Vine, the true." That little phrase, the true, interjected after the declaration, emphasized the fact that He was borrowing from the past economy. That figure of the vine runs all through the old economy. It is found in psalm and prophecy. Jesus stood at last among these Jewish disciples, and He said, "I am the Vine, the true!" Glancing back to the ancient prophecy in which it is declared that the vine which should have brought forth grapes had brought forth wild grapes we have an exposition of fruit-bearing. What is the fruit the vine ought to have brought forth? God looked for righteousness and for judgment. Instead of judgment, He found oppression; instead of righteousness, He found a cry! The fruit for which God was looking on His vine was judgment and righteousness Judgment is not punishment; punishment may be an aspect of it, but judgment is government, true, righteous, just. He looked for judgment, and, behold, oppression. He looked for righteousness, and, behold, a cry. Now said Jesus, "I am the true Vine." By that He meant that through Him judgment and righteousness are coming to the world.

With that general statement in mind, let us observe the fruit-bearing of Jesus. I shall content myself now with the most general statement concerning it. Will you call to mind the first words that Jesus is recorded to have uttered on the verge of His public ministry? I am not now referring to His boyhood's words, but to those He uttered on the day when He came to John's baptism. John said, "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" Then Jesus said, "Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteoumess." At the end of that public ministry the Greeks came asking to see Him, and He said, "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself." The first word of the public ministry declared that righteousness was to be fulfilled. At the close He said, "Now is the judgment of this world." The Lord looketh down from heaven for righteousness and for judgment, and in the long history of the race He had found oppression and a cry; but, at last, in this Man He found righteousness and judgment, not in Himself alone, but in Him for humanity.

"Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." What was this that He said must be done? It was the baptism of repentance. But He had nothing to repent of! He repented for humanity as He bent to the baptism, and completed His repentance in the passion baptism whereby He made possible the fulfilment of righteousness in the case of men who had failed. When did He declare that judgment, the true government of the world, was coming? When He said, "Now is My soul troubled." By the way of the Cross, that for which God and man had looked, and looked in vain, shall come the judgment of the world, its true government; for the prince of the world is cast out, and our Lord being lifted by the Cross fulfils the purpose of God. In all the ministry of Jesus between that initial word and that final word deeds and teaching, tarryings and journeyings, were true to that passion and purpose. He was bearing fruit.

Now to His friends, He said, I have appointed you to bear fruit. We can leave once more all the ampler outlooks and become immediate, practical, simple. How are we to bear this fruit of righteousness and judgment in the world? Not for ourselves is this fruit to be borne. The figure of fruit denies that spiritual selfishness which simply seeks spiritual blessing to consume it on our own desires. The prevailing sin of the Church is that. The fruit we bear is for others, for the world. How are we to bear that fruit? Only as we are brought into such relation with Jesus that we share His self-emptying. The kenosis must be repeated in His disciples if they are to bear fruit. That is fundamental, initial. How shall we express it? By becoming obedient unto death. If we interpret that by the facts of His life we shall see how we are to bear fruit. By our being ready to go into the company of sinners, by our ability to repent on behalf of sinners, by our belief in sinning men, by our justification of them through our belief in them, by infinite patience with them, by the pouring out of our lives for them and into them, we bear fruit. We see immediately that we can never be fruit-bearers in this sense unless we actually begin at the beginning and put ourselves into definite, living, personal, immediate contact with sinning men. There has been a teaching of separation from the world that in some of its aspects has been utterly pernicious. We are not to withdraw from the society in which we are living, but to stay there and bear fruit there. In proportion as we know what it is to have true fellowship with the Son of God we shall seek out the depraved, the lost, the sunken, the bruised and the unclean, and, sitting down by them, we shall bear the fruit of righteousness and judgment for them as we pour out our lives in sacrificial service.

We need a Church reformed to the pattern of her Lord, the self-emptying One Who bears the fruit of righteousness and judgment in a world dying for lack of righteousness and judgment. He came into contact with polluted and spoiled humanity, and while the Pharisees looked on and were amazed and hostile, He received them and made Himself their friend. We have not begun to learn the meaning of true friendship for Jesus Christ until we have sacrificed our sensibilities and our refinements and our preferences as we gather to our heart and life and actual fellowship sinning men and women in order that we may lift and change them by that holy contact.

It is a hard word, and who is sufficient for it? Then let us remember that Jesus said, Not only have I appointed you to bear fruit, but I have appointed you to ask the Father whatsoever you need in order to its bearing. If the condition of fellowship be kenosis or self-emptying and the Cross, the resource for that fruit-bearing is pleroma, that fulness which there is in Christ, for "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and in Him ye are made full." If the task be a great one, and if from it flesh and sense shrink, let us ask that we may receive that enduement and equipment of the very compassionate cleansing life of Christ that will enable us to bear this fruit in the world to His glory.

We all began our Christian discipleship as slaves. It is a solemn beginning, characterized by a great silence and a great submission, but if we have come no further than that fruit is rare. That is why there are so many degenerate vines in the vineyard of the Lord. Maintained fellowship with Christ brings us into friendship. We come to that in hours when we are oppressed, frightened, perplexed, and we dare ask Him questions, and have such confidence in Him that we dare express our doubts to Him. In response to such questions and such doubts He is able to tell us His secrets and so to lead us as presently to say, "No longer do I call you servants ... but I have called you friends."

Let us gladden His heart by such intimate friendship that through us He may be able to do what He desires to do for this sad and needy world.